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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007692

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR ABRAMS/POUNDS

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SUBJECT: NEA PDAS CHENEY'S SEPTEMBER 27-29 VISIT TO CAIRO -
MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER NAZIF

Classified by Charge Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[¶11.](#) (C) Prime Minister Nazif said that he hoped domestic election observers would be permitted during upcoming parliamentary elections but was pessimistic about international observers. He agreed that other improvements to the election process, like transparent ballot boxes and greater voter education, would be worth pursuing. Nazif lamented the sorry state of Egypt's opposition parties and suggested upcoming parliamentary elections might result in greater, not less, NDP dominance of the People's Assembly. Nazif expressed concern that delay in announcing the start of U.S.-Egypt FTA negotiations undermined the U.S. image in Egypt and added that the GOE was anxious for an announcement on expansion of QIZ's in Egypt. End summary.

[¶12.](#) (C) NEA PDAS Elizabeth Cheney met September 28 with Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif. Also sitting in on the Egyptian side were Foreign Trade and Industry Minister Rachid Rachid and Nazif's Chef de Cabinet, Dr. Sami Saad Zaghloul. PDAS Cheney was accompanied by NEA DAS Scott Carpenter, Charge, and ECPO Counselor (notetaker).

Nazif Lauds Presidential Poll

[¶13.](#) (C) The Prime Minister opened the meeting by expressing satisfaction with the conduct of the September 7 presidential election and the neutral role played by the GOE. Nazif stressed that the September 7 poll should serve as a precedent not only for the next presidential election in five years but also for the parliamentary elections taking place in two months. Nazif highlighted:
-- "very good success" in ensuring that government agencies and officials, which behaved as agents of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) in prior elections, remained non-partisan,
-- the restrained approach of police and other security officials on election day itself, also a departure from past practice, and
-- the Ministry of Information's success in ensuring balanced coverage, particularly television coverage, of all the candidates.

Observers at the Parliamentary Election

[¶14.](#) (C) Despite the successes, Nazif acknowledged that there was much the GOE could fix before the parliamentary elections. He pointed to GOE "flip-flopping" on election observers followed by a last-minute decision to admit them to polling stations. While the parliamentary election commission is independent, it serves a more administrative function, is headed by the Minister of Justice and includes a number of executive branch officials, so the GOE might have "more leeway" to push for some process improvements. He encouraged the Embassy to present these improvements to the Ministry of Justice. Nazif said that Egyptian NGOs would be allowed to enter polling stations but was more pessimistic regarding international monitors: "I cannot promise international monitoring, but I can promise monitoring."

Building on Success

[¶15.](#) (C) PDAS Cheney stressed that the USG considered it very important for the parliamentary elections to be open to international observers. It was also important, she said, that the GOE build on the positive aspects of the September 7 vote to make the parliamentary elections more credible. There were a number of simple steps - transparent ballot boxes, proper organization and transparency of voter lists, voter education, training for judges - that would significantly increase the credibility of the parliamentary vote. The USG was willing to

provide technical assistance in these areas, including through organizations such as the UN. She said she and DAS Carpenter would be using their meetings over the next few days to generate concrete ideas for next steps and USG assistance. She said she looked forward to sharing these ideas with the PM and other key members of the GOE in the coming weeks.

16. (C) Nazif agreed that technical assistance provided through the U.N. would be more palatable than assistance directly from the U.S. (Note: when he said this, Rachid shook his head no). Nazif acknowledged the problem with voter lists, but suggested it was a problem that could only be fixed over time, not quickly enough for the parliamentary election. He called transparent ballot boxes "a tricky issue." He said that insistence on transparent boxes would be seen as a slap to the Ministry of Interior's integrity. However, Nazif noted, the Ministry had always cited cost as an obstacle to use of transparent boxes, so if outside funding could be found perhaps the Ministry would lose one of its objections.

17. (C) The Prime Minister proposed that voter education be handled by the Ministry of Information rather than the electoral commission. He said that, for the presidential election, the Ministry had launched a very impressive and non-partisan campaign encouraging voters to turn out. Regarding training for the judicial officials who would administer the voting, Nazif suggested that such training could be handled through the Judges Training Center. He noted that the judges were accustomed to getting training there, and would not be offended by the need for election-specific instruction if it were handled correctly. Minister Rachid said that officials had received training in advance of the presidential election and would receive further training before the parliamentary election.

Keeping Mubarak's Promises

18. (C) Nazif said that the GOE needed to work to fulfill the promises President Mubarak made during the presidential election campaign, adding that the legal and institutional changes Mubarak called for would take two more People's Assembly sessions (i.e., two more years) to carry out. Nazif noted that Mubarak had called for distribution of power between the president and the cabinet as well as between the executive branch and the legislature. Mubarak promised to replace the emergency law with anti-terrorism legislation and increase the representation of women in government. Mubarak also called for greater balance among political parties in parliament.

Egypt's Weak Parties

19. (C) On the latter point, Nazif said that the NDP's decades-long dominance of Egyptian politics would be difficult to undo. He noted that virtually all those who aspire to parliamentary seats pursue the NDP's backing. Some of those that fail to get it run successfully as independents and then join the NDP once in office. "This is still a country focussed around the NDP," he said. Nazif was frustrated by the Wafd Party's poor performance during the presidential election campaign. This diminished his hopes that the Wafd could ever become a viable alternative, though he acknowledged that it was the GOE that had weakened the Wafd and other opposition parties over the past decades. He expressed hope that "good people" in the second and third tier of the Wafd leadership might someday revive the party. Nazif was equally frustrated by Ghad Party leader Ayman Nour's success in the presidential campaign, dismissing him as "childish." Nazif admitted that the GOE had only itself to blame for Nour's success, as his trial on forgery charges had significantly raised his profile. "We made a hero of him," Nazif lamented.

110. (C) Nazif said that the opposition parties, poorly led and short of funds, would be able to field candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections in no more than 20-25 percent of constituencies. Rachid pointed out that, as a result of its experience with the presidential election, the NDP was more organized and effective than it had ever been and may find itself after the elections with an even more overwhelming grip on parliament. Egypt needs a party list rather than a constituency-based system, Nazif observed, if it is to expand opposition representation in parliament.

FTA Concerns

¶11. (C) Nazif closed the meeting by stressing that "Egypt is a country the U.S. can depend on." The two countries see eye-to-eye on the big issues of peace, regional stability, and economic development. Recalling his meeting two days earlier with Under Secretary Hughes, Nazif stressed that improving Arabs' perceptions of the U.S. was in the GOE's interest as well as the U.S. interest. One step that Nazif argued would enhance the U.S. image in Egypt is the launch of FTA negotiations and both Nazif and Rachid expressed concern at what they perceived as U.S. backsliding. Nazif said that President Bush had told him that the U.S. would be ready for Egypt FTA negotiations once the Central America FTA was through Congress. Rachid noted that negotiations would have to start soon if they were to be completed before the expiration of Trade Promotion Authority in 2007. Nazif also urged action on expanding the QIZ's, which he hoped was underway.

¶12. (U) PDAS Cheney cleared this message.

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